

Against the Grain

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Michelle Craft Profile

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find medical information. The results from 1,210 respondents led **Boruff** and **Storie** to conclude that various technological and intellectual barriers do not appear to keep medical trainees and faculty from using their devices to find information. However, access barriers and lack of awareness "might keep them from using reliable, library-licensed resources."⁴ With the emergence of medical apps that provide drug information, guidelines, textbooks, and journals our patrons now have the ability to bypass our electronic front door, the library Website, for services and resources. Use of tablets by physicians doubled in 2012⁵ and use by clinicians probably continues to grow. This trend is also changing students' perceptions of textbooks. A survey from the **Pearson Foundation** revealed that a majority of college students prefer digital books over print, and both college and high school students believe tablets will effectively replace textbooks within the next five years.⁶

This presents a challenge for librarians because so much of what we do is creating easy access to information. We have made it so easy that many patrons do not realize their electronic journals, databases, and other resources are available because of the librarian. This does not mean that librarians should stop making things easier to use and find. On the contrary, our patrons already think Google is easy. We not only need to make our resources easier than Google, but we need to rethink how we provide services and resources and adapt to the changes technology has brought to society. History is full of professions that faded away as technology changed society. The switchboard operator, milkman, newspaper industry, reporters, and the postal service all have seen their industries drastically change as a result of technology and evolution of society.

As society has evolved, it has changed the way people do and perceive things. The word "Google" has evolved to be more than just the name of an Internet company. It has become a verb, used to indicate somebody searching for information on the Internet, just as "Xerox" was once a popular term used to indicate somebody making a photocopy. Patrons have changed the way they find information and librarians need to scrutinize every service and resource with future in mind. This means that traditional services, resources, and job duties that librarians were taught in library school may also need to be examined. The library catalog, information desk, instruction, tables of content services, acquisition, etc. are all traditional staples in the library and eliminating them might be considered a type of librarian heresy. However, librarians must think these heretical thoughts to adapt to changes.

The Uniqueness of Librarians and the Need to Rethink Services

Since most people can Google a question and get an answer, what makes librarians unique and important to their patrons? Librarians provide more in-depth, customized,

against the grain people profile

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BORN AND LIVED: I was born and raised in St. Louis, MO but I have lived in Cleveland, OH for 15 years.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I work trying to provide resources to the Cleveland Clinic Alumni Library and the other regional hospitals of the Cleveland Clinic Health System.

FAMILY: My husband **Mike** and I have three kids and a dog who keep us very busy.

IN MY SPARE TIME: I spend a lot time with my family, watch SciFi shows, swim, and during football season I go to Cleveland Browns games and I obsess over fantasy football.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Primarily SciFi books.

PET PEEVES: Whining.

PHILOSOPHY: Figure it out. Don't wait for things to happen, make your own opportunities.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Representing and serving **MLA (Medical Library Association)** membership as an **MLA Board Member** and soon as **President elect**.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Become the director of a medical library.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I see librarians getting out of the library and embedding library resources into everyday technologies and processes of the university or hospital environment. Librarians will be focused on partnerships and will provide more information outside of the library building. 🌱



help, and relevant information to their patrons than a search engine. The interactions between librarians and patrons are important to the future of librarianship. Librarians must ask the question, "What job duties take up most of my time that are not directly working with the patron?" Then they must ask the more difficult question, "Are those duties really essential?" The answer to those questions will vary between libraries and library staff. Part-time solo hospital librarians may find themselves spending too much time trying to catalog and process books. In that case, the hospital librarian may wonder whether it is necessary to even have a library catalog given the size of the collection and patron usage and browsing patterns. Perhaps a Web-enabled spreadsheet or a LibraryThing organizational account may adequately fill the role of a traditional catalog. Larger academic medical librarians have already begun to question the concept of maintaining and staffing both a reference and circulation desk, many have already merged the two desks into a single service desk or eliminated the reference desk entirely by having reference librarians available by appointment. Part of a service desk at **Lamar Soutter Library (University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA)** was eliminated in order to support a new model of blended librarianship, one that is not

bound by the traditional library or library professional.⁷ The evolution of the reference desk to single service desk at **Jane Bancroft Cook Library** (a shared resource of **New College of Florida** and the **University of South Florida**) eventually led to the elimination of the circulation department. The circulation department's staff switched to focus on interlibrary loan and expanding into document delivery, something that had previously been impossible due to staffing arrangements.⁸

Sacred Cows and Heretical Thoughts

A recent discussion of medical librarians on Twitter focused on the "sacred cows" of librarianship, services or resources once so important and ingrained in library tradition that it is unthinkable to eliminate them. Yet these librarians discussed the unthinkable and the heretical librarian thoughts did not just stop with the idea of removing the reference desk. Some discussed eliminating regularly scheduled educational classes in lieu of customized classes scheduled by appointment or online only classes. The idea of moving to only an electronic book and journal collection was discussed. Other collection development ideas discussed included moving to patron-driven acquisition, thus switching the power of purchasing books from the librarian to patron.

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